SILENT DRAGON

by

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and

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Part 1 of 6

Second Draft

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PAGE 1

Leinil: Thanks for your patience, and welcome to the weird and wonderful, insanely violent world of SILENT DRAGON. I was thinking this opening sequence might work well as a series of full-width panels, with empty space between them for wide, title-like captions --

1) Full-width panel. Extreme close on the EYE of a black dragon on a red silk background - the symbol of the Hideaki clan. Eyes will be a recurrent image in this series - eyeballs, camera lenses, spy satellites. As if the comic itself is watching us...

2) Full-width caption panel, blank background:

CAPTION
HIDEAKI FORTRESS, TOKYO

3) Full-width panel. Bigger. Pull back into an exterior establishing shot of an ancient Japanese castle, night-time. High ramparts constructed from massive, artfully-cut blocks of granite; red-tiled roofs, crenellated walls. Red silk pennants lift gently in the breeze, each bearing the black dragon symbol.

4) Full-width caption panel, blank background:

CAPTION
2063 A.D.

5) BIG! Pull back to reveal that the "ancient" castle is in fact perched atop a FANTASTICALLY MASSIVE late-21st century skyscraper in the middle of a sprawling, futuristic Tokyo. Ultra-high-tech buildings rise up out of the neon-lit smog, each of them as wide as an entire city block, spearing up towards the distant stars. It looks like the ancient castle was lifted stone-by-stone and rebuilt atop the 1000th floor of a mile-high skyscraper... which it was.

PAGE 2

1) Small. Extreme close-up on the wide-open eye of a dead Japanese man, an anonymous Yakuza enforcer. His face lies in a pool of blood, his dead eye staring straight out at us. He may have ornate tattoos and bionic enhancements - both badges of honor for Yakuza members.

2) Small. Pull back to reveal more Yakuza lying dead, their blood pooling on the burnished mahogany floor. Compact, hi-tech machine-pistols and spent shell casings lie scattered all around them - but their wounds were delivered not by bullets, but by precise, powerful sword-strokes...

3) Small. Close on a blood-stained *katana* (samurai long-sword) held in one hand at a man's side...

REIZO
(off-panel above)
DON'T BE AFRAID, TAKARA...

4) BIG, impressive reveal of REIZO - an intense, well-dressed Yakuza freelancer with crisply handsome features and the coiled intensity of a jungle cat. He is battle-scarred but triumphant, flecked with (other people's) blood, his clothes pock-marked by multiple bullet-impacts. Although it is not immediately apparent, his entire body is an artificial, android-like construction, like a bloodless Terminator. The sword hangs at his side in one hand, while he holds his other hand out towards us, as if inviting us to join him. His expression is blank, unreadable, and it is not immediately clear whether he is here to threaten or protect us. Dead Yakuza enforcers lie sprawled behind him - the implication being that he massacred them single-handed.

We are in an ornate hall/lounge deep within the castle, the walls and furniture riddled with bullet-holes. The decor is modern and comfortable, but with a traditional Japanese esthetic. Antique watercolors, weapons and armor hang on the walls, alongside the ubiquitous black dragon flag. Although we don't necessarily need to establish it in this panel, there will be a huge fireplace somewhere in this room, above which a paired *katana* and *wakizashi* (short-sword) used to hang - although now only the short-sword remains (Reizo took the *katana*).

REIZO
I SAID I WOULD COME BACK FOR YOU.

PAGE 3

1) Reizo's POV. Close on TAKARA - a hauntingly beautiful Chinese woman in her late 20s (and the only non-Japanese character in this story). She's afraid, but mastering her fear, too strong to cry. Not a fighter, but a formidable woman nonetheless. She levels a tiny but powerful-looking machine pistol at us --

TAKARA
REIZO, **WAIT**--
(link)
YOU-- YOU HAVE TO **LISTEN**, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S **HAPPENING** HERE...
(link)
WE DON'T HAVE TO **KILL** EACH OTHER! YOU AND I, WE-- WE'RE ON THE **SAME SIDE**--

2) Reizo smiles, kindly, almost pityingly. But his dark eyes are sad, deeply soulful. He raises his sword one-handed, the tip of the blade now pointing straight out towards us...

REIZO
OH, MY LOVE...

3) Small, close-up. Reizo opens his hand and lets go of the ornate sword hilt - but instead of falling, the sword hangs motionless in the air, as if by magic. This is one of Reizo's party tricks - "magneto-telekinesis".

4) Small, close-up. Reizo gestures with his hand, and the sword slowly rotates in mid-air, the tip of the blade now pointing back towards him. He holds out the empty black-lacquered scabbard with his other hand...

5) Small, close-up. The *katana* sheathes itself. Leinil, feel free to break this up into several smaller panels if it works better that way.

6) Reizo steps up close to Takara, gently brushing her weapon aside with the back of his hand. He is still smiling sadly, his eyes locked onto hers...

REIZO
... DON'T YOU KNOW ME YET?

PAGE 4

1) Full-width panel. Extreme close on Reizo’s eyes. His irises are BLACK; not dark brown, but jet black. And although they are as artificial as the rest of him, and incapable of tears, they reflect the light in such a way as to seem brimming with emotion. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, Reizo is a soul with a broken heart, desperate with hope...

2) Extreme close on Takara, her own eyes wide with quiet astonishment as the light of recognition dawns across her face --

TAKARA
(small text whisper)
... RENJIRO?

3) Profile shot. They stand gazing into each other’s eyes, almost close enough to kiss. Reizo’s eyes are full of yearning; Takara’s, uncertainty, hope and pity. She touches his face with her fingertips, tender, almost disbelieving...

TAKARA
MY PRECIOUS RENJIRO... BUT I SAW--
(link)
ALL THIS TIME, I THOUGHT YOU--
(link)
WHAT... DID THEY **DO** TO YOU... ?

4) Reizo closes his eyes, overwhelmed with emotion, unable to speak. He presses her hand against his cheek, feeling her warmth.

5) Suddenly they both react as the floor begins to SHAKE --

TAKARA
NO...
(link)
PLEASE, NOT NOW--

6) The wooden floor suddenly SPLITS OPEN at their feet, a jagged line running between the two of them, separating them --

SAMURAI
(ragged text; no tail)
TRAITOR!

PAGE 5

1) BIG! A 30-foot tall SAMURAI WAR DROID suddenly erupts up through the floor beneath them, like a demon rising from the depths of Hell! Fires burn beneath its samurai armor and war mask, its eyes blazing like hot coals - but underneath the ceremonial dress it's a state-of-the-art, military-issue, bipedal combat droid, bristling with high-tech weaponry. A walking tank, modified by skilled craftsmen to resemble a demon of ancient Japanese myth. It towers over Reizo and Takara, dwarfing them, infinitely menacing --

SAMURAI
(ragged text)
YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE COME BACK.

2) Full-width panel. Reizo LEAPS towards us, fierce, snarling; the sword held aloft, two-handed, ready to deliver a devastating death-blow. He flies through the air almost as if defying gravity --

PAGE 6

Leinil, with this page we jump back a year in time; but we want to make the transition so seamless, the reader shouldn't realize at first that the scene has actually changed at all --

1) Extreme close on a pair of hands gripping the sword hilt, bringing it down in a powerful, precise blow, perfectly level and controlled. Angle this image so that it looks like a continuous progression of the action from the previous page - even though it isn't. <u>But this is the same sword we saw Reizo use</u>.

2) Pull back to reveal the new scene. A stocky, middle-aged man - RENJIRO - is practising swordplay in a woodland glade. He stands motionless, the sword held two-handed in front of him, perfectly level with he ground. He wears traditional Japanese garb, with his back to us so we cannot see his face. The Hideaki dragon symbol is printed on the back of his tunic, between the shoulder blades. He wears the paired *katana* and *wakizashi* scabbards tucked into his sash-belt, samurai-style. It is dawn, magic hour; a faint layer of cool mist filters through the pine trees. We could almost be back in the 16th century...

3) View from close BEHIND Renjiro as he cocks his head slightly at the sound of a voice from off-panel --

<u>Note to letterer</u>: Ikiryo always speaks with ghostly, raspy, tailless balloons, suggesting a hoarse whisper --

IKIRYO
(ghostly; no tail)
RENJIRO.

4) Full-width caption panel, blank background:

CAPTION
ONE YEAR EARLIER

5) Renjiro turns to look at us over his shoulder, allowing us to see his face for the first time. He's in his 50s, gray-haired, his face lined and careworn, weighed down by years of sadness and compromise - although right now he is frowning with suspicion, or curiosity. He is an intelligent, thoughtful, quiet, introspective man (picture "Beat" Takeshi Kitano). He is not particularly tall, his body stocky and powerful, like an old knotted tree. <u>And he has Reizo's eyes</u>. The face may be different, but those jet-black eyes are *identical*...

PAGE 7

1) Renjiro's POV. A FOX silently watches us from the tree-line.

2) View from within the deep shadows of the pine forest. The tail of the fox is disappearing off-panel right as the animal scampers back into the safety of the trees. In the background, beyond the silhouettes of pine trunks, we see Renjiro out in the clearing, watching us. He sheathes his sword in the traditional manner - smartly, holding the sword out at arm's length, the tip pointing back to the neck of the scabbard in his left hand.

3) Renjiro steps into the shadowy woods; wary, watchful, expectant, his hand touching a tree trunk as he passes...

4) Deep in the woods now, Renjiro turns and looks over at something that scares him just a little. But he is not an expressive man, and he successfully maintains his dignified composure --

IKIRYO
(no tail)
YOUR TIME IS ALMOST ***UP,*** *RENJIRO.*

5) Big. Over-the-shoulder shot looking down past Renjiro at a GHOSTLY FIGURE that hovers in the shadows between the trees. A decrepit old man in traditional garb, his face withered and cruel, with empty eye sockets, his teeth filed down to sharp little points. He sits cross-legged, hovering in the air with his wrists resting on his knees, his long fingernails hanging down like claws. And he is TRANSPARENT, like a ghost. This is IKIRYO.

IKIRYO
YOU ARE ABOUT TO ENTER ***HELL.***

PAGE 8

1) BIG. Reverse angle, looking up past (and through!) Ikiryo to see Renjiro gazing down at him.

Leinil, this is a very talk-heavy scene, but hopefully there'll be enough room for the dialogue. Let me know if it's a problem.

RENJIRO
... WHAT ARE YOU?
(link)
AN INTERMEDIARY? AN **EMISSARY... ?**

IKIRYO
CALL ME **IKIRYO.**

RENJIRO
IKIRYO. **"LIVING GHOST"...**
(link)
YOU THINK ME A **FOOLISH OLD MAN** TO **TREMBLE** AT THE SIGHT OF **FOREST DEMONS?** SHOW ME YOUR **TRUE FACE!**

2) Close on Ikiryo, sly and cruel.

IKIRYO
THE **BLACK DRAGON CLAN** WRAPS ITSELF IN THE CLOAK OF **ANCIENT TRADITION...**
(link)
WHY NOT ALSO JAPAN'S **RIGHTFUL RULERS?**

3) Ikiryo's POV. Renjiro looks scornful, unimpressed, as he turns and walks away from us, throwing a dismissive wave back over his shoulder at us --

RENJIRO
THE **ANCIENT ART** OF **REMOTE HOLOGRAPHY.** *HMMPH!*
(link)
YOU MUST BE CAST FROM A **SPY SATELLITE.** WILL IT STILL BE ABLE TO READ MY **LIPS**, I WONDER, WHEN I TURN MY **BACK** ON YOU... ?

4) Reverse angle - Renjiro is now walking towards us, away from where Ikiryo was a moment before. But the "ghost" has suddenly re-appeared right in front of Renjiro, who stops in his tracks, surprised --

Cont'd...

Cont'd:

IKIRYO

SCORN US, THEN. BUT WE KNOW THAT DOUBTS **PLAGUE** YOU, RENJIRO!

(link)

YOU HAVE SERVED YOUR MASTER HIDEAKI **WELL.** COULD HE HAVE RISEN TO BECOME UNDISPUTED CRIME-LORD OF ALL HONSHU WITHOUT **YOU** TO GUIDE HIM...?

(link)

WE THINK NOT.

PAGE 9

1) Medium close on Renjiro, frowning, slightly uncomfortable at the implication.

RENJIRO
LORD HIDEAKI HAS MANY ADVISORS.

2) Close on Ikiryo, sly, pointing an accusing, bony finger at us..

IKIRYO
YET NONE SO **WISE** - NOR AS **TRUSTED** -
AS **YOU.**
(link)
WE HAVE BEEN **WATCHING** YOU, RENJIRO.
ALWAYS YOU TRY TO CONVINCE YOURSELF
THAT YOU ACT FOR THE **GREATER GOOD.**
TO **FREE** YOUR BELOVED NATION FROM
ITS **USURPERS...**
(link)
YET DEEP IN YOUR SOUL, YOU **KNOW** YOU
SERVE A **MONSTER.** ONE YOU HELPED
CREATE.

3) Ikiryo rises to his feet before Renjiro, "standing" in the air. The holographic ghost holds his hands out wide in a gesture of openness and generosity...

IKIRYO
THAT TIME IS NOW **ENDING.** THE YAKUZA
CLANS WILL SOON BE NO MORE. BUT
YOU, RENJIRO - YOU COULD BE
INVALUABLE TO US.
(link)
IMAGINE HOW MANY **LIVES** COULD BE
SAVED, HOW MUCH **BLOODSHED** SPARED,
BY THE **KNOWLEDGE** YOU WIELD!
(link)
JOIN US, AND WE WILL OFFER YOU **SAFE
HAVEN.**
(link)
SERVE **HIDEAKI...** AND **FALL!**

4) Renjiro. Arms crossed, scornful, defiant.

RENJIRO
FOR **FOUR HUNDRED YEARS** MY LINE HAS
SERVED CLAN HIDEAKI. YOU WOULD HAVE
ME **BETRAY** MY OWN **ANCESTORS?**
(link)
I WOULD RATHER **DIE...**

Cont'd...

Cont'd:

5) Renjiro marches straight THROUGH the hologram as if it wasn’t there, causing it to degrade in a burst of static.

RENJIRO
...WITH **HONOR.**

<u>PAGE 10</u>

1) Wide, very high and distant aerial establishing shot. Renjiro walks from the trees, across a grassy hillside towards a large feudal-style lodge - Hideaki's country retreat. There's a dusty courtyard at the back with wooden steps on each side. Again, we could almost be hundreds of years in the past...

2) BIG. A small group of Yakuza heavies are gathered in the courtyard at the back of the lodge, lounging on the stairs and on parked gravity-bikes. They are all heavily armed. Their dress is a showy combination of faux-traditional styles and ultra-high tech bionic fashion. They're watching two shirtless men sparring at *karate*. One of the fighters is a regular Yakuza goon, looking very much the worse for wear - black eye, broken nose, bloody. The other fighter is MANZO, Hideaki's number-one lieutenant and right-hand man - a muscular, murderous pit-bull of a man. Spectacular dragon tatoos across his shoulders evolve into massively ornate bionic arms and clawed hands. He turns to see Renjiro approaching off-panel --

MANZO
RENJIRO! YOU'RE **LATE,** LADY TAKARA'S
BEEN **LOOKING** FOR YOU.
(link)
WERE YOU LOST IN THE **WOODS...** ?

3) Renjiro approaches, calm, unexpressive. His sheathed swords tucked into his sash belt.

RENJIRO
SWORD PRACTICE. IT HELPS ME **THINK.**

4) Move in closer on them. Manzo suddenly lashes out, catching his sparring partner in the throat with his claws, sending the poor bastard flying backwards, blood spraying --

MANZO
IT DOESN'T HELP YOU **FIGHT.**

PAGE 11

1) Medium close on Renjiro, quietly unimpressed, his face carefully blank, giving Manzo nothing to react against. Manzo's opponent hits the ground behind him, his legs tumbling up into frame as he crash-rolls to the ground in a spray of blood. Renjiro doesn't even blink --

RENJIRO
THERE IS A REASON THEY CALL IT A MARTIAL **ART**, MANZO.
(link)
NOT EVERYTHING HAS TO BE ABOUT **KILLING.**

2) Low angle, impressive. Manzo straightens, crossing his massive arms, defiant. Showing off his impressive physique. The guys behind him smirk, sycophantic, although they can't be seen to be too disrespectful of Renjiro...

MANZO
OF COURSE, NOTHING EVER **IS** ABOUT KILLING WHERE YOU'RE CONCERNED, IS IT, *KOMON*? YOU'LL HAPPILY POINT THE **FINGER**, BUT YOU ALWAYS LEAVE THE **DIRTY WORK** TO SOMEONE **ELSE...**
(link)
... WHILE YOU STAND ON THE **SIDELINES** AND WATCH THE **BLOOD** FLY.

3) Move in very close on Manzo, oozing hate and menace, as he raises one claw-like hand. Blood drips from it.

MANZO
GOD FORBID YOU'D EVER GET ANY ON YOUR **OWN** HANDS.

4) Renjiro walks past Manzo and on up the wooden stairs to the lodge, his back to us here. The Yakuza guys on the stairs step aside to let him pass. Manzo stands in the foreground, his back to Renjiro, turning his head slightly to follow where Renjiro just walked past him. Manzo has just been disrespected in front of his men, and he doesn't like it one little bit...

RENJIRO
THE PROFUNDITY OF YOUR INSIGHT ASTOUNDS AS EVER, MANZO. NOW IF YOU ARE **FINISHED**, GATHER THE MEN. WE HAVE A **FEAST** TO PREPARE FOR...
(link)
... AND YOUR **SECURITY** IS A **JOKE.**

Cont'd...

Cont'd:

5) Close on Manzo, his eyes narrowed, simmering with hate, turning to watch Renjiro leave (off-panel)...

PAGE 12

1) In one of the lodge's wide internal corridors, Renjiro pauses politely as TAKARA approaches. Renjiro's manner is faultlessly polite, almost deferential.

RENJIRO
LADY TAKARA. FORGIVE ME, I UNDERSTAND THERE IS SOMETHNG YOU WISH TO DISCUSS... ?

2) Takara sides open the wood-and-paper door to her suite. Her manner is secretive, conspiratorial.

RENJIRO
HERE.

3) Uncomfortable, Renjiro follows her into her opulent bedroom suite. Classical Japanese style with a few ultra-modern fittings and devices here and there. Takara turns to him and smiles sadly.

RENJIRO
MY LADY, THIS IS... NOT APPROPRIATE. IF LORD HIDEAKI WAS TO DISCOVER ME IN YOUR BED CHAMBER--

TAKARA
HE'S OFF CAVORTING WITH HIS *GEISHAS*. WE WON'T BE DISTURBED.
(link)
POOR RENJIRO - ALWAYS **CALCULATING** THE RISKS, NEVER **TAKING** THEM...

5) Close on Takara, making eye contact with us. She slips her gown off her shoulders, exposing pale skin. Bedroom eyes...

TAKARA
BUT I HAVE SEEN THE WAY YOU **LOOK** AT ME WHEN YOU THINK I HAVEN'T NOTICED. YOU WEAR A MASK BEFORE THE WORLD...
(link)
... BUT YOU CANNOT HIDE THE **TRUTH** BEHIND YOUR **EYES**.

1) Profile shot. Takara steps close to him, gazing into his eyes. Renjiro is uncomfortable, almost afraid as she approaches, holding her gown across her breasts...

RENJIRO
WHAT...
(link)
WHAT TRUTH... ?

TAKARA
JUST THIS ONCE, LET US **PUT DOWN** OUR MASKS. I'M AFRAID THAT... AFTER **TONIGHT...**
(link)
... WE MAY NEVER GET THE **CHANCE** AGAIN...

2) Extreme close-up. Takara's lips move close to his, parting slightly, the kiss just a moment away...

3) Extreme close-up. Renjiro's hand touches her bare upper arm, as if he's about to pull her close to him --

4) Renjiro suddenly pulls away, turning from her, hating himself for it. She is angry and heartbroken at the same time --

RENJIRO
I-- I CANNOT.
(link)
HE IS MY LORD, MY *OYABUN*, AND YOU ARE HIS **WIFE.** I OWE HIM MY **ALLEGIANCE**, MY **HONOR** --

5) Takara pulls her gown tight around herself again, angry and betrayed. Unknowingly, she puts one hand to the spot on her arm where Renjiro touched her. Tears begin to come --

TAKARA
BUT WHAT OF YOUR **HEART**, RENJIRO?
(link)
I **KNOW** YOU LOVE ME! LET ME HEAR YOU **SAY IT!**

6) Takara's POV. Renjiro has all but turned his back on us - he can't bring himself to face her. He is in agony. He leans against a pillar or piece of furniture, his shoulders sagging as if under the weight of the world. Crushed.

Cont'd...

Cont'd:

RENJIRO

(small text)

SINCE THE MOMENT I FIRST SAW YOU.

1) Close on Takara, snarling through her tears now, as if challenging him --

TAKARA
THEN KNOW **THIS!** EITHER **HIDEAKI** DIES TONIGHT...
(link)
... OR **I** DO!

2) Close on Renjiro's shocked reaction as he turns to face us.

3) His expression demands an explanation from her. Takara has become grim, matter-of-fact. She's a strong woman, prepared to make impossible choices.

TAKARA
HE THINKS HE CAN **UNITE** THE THREE CLANS, BUT **LORD KEIJI** AND **LORD KAZUO** HAVE GOOD REASON NOT **TRUST** HIM.
(link)
AND SO TONIGHT, WHEN THEY SHARE *SAKE* TO **SEAL** THE ALLIANCE...
(link)
... HIDEAKI'S CUP WILL BE **POISONED.**

4) Close on Takara, her eyes pleading...

TAKARA
SO NOW YOU KNOW EVERYTHING, WILL YOU **WARN** YOUR MASTER, AND **RETAIN** YOUR PRECIOUS HONOR...
(link)
... AND STAND IDLY BY TO WATCH ME **TORTURED** TO DEATH?

5) Renjiro looks desperate, trapped, close to panic. He pleads with her as she moves to slide the door open --

RENJIRO
TAKARA, PLEASE...
(link)
I CANNOT-- YOU CAN'T ASK ME TO--

TAKARA
I WILL NO LONGER BE A **SLAVE** IN MY OWN HOUSE, RENJIRO. I WILL NOT LIVE IN **FEAR.**
(Cont'd...)

Cont'd...

Cont'd:

TAKARA (Cont'd)

(link)

AND **YOU...**

6) Close on Takara, turning to us as she pauses in the open doorway, the wood-and-paper door hiding half her face. Serious eye contact --

TAKARA

... YOU CANNOT STAY **SILENT** ANY LONGER.

(link)

IT'S TIME TO PICK A **SIDE.**

PAGE 15

1) NIGHT. Full-width establishing shot of the country lodge, beneath a full moon.

2) Low angle shot. Pull back wide to reveal the scene. We are in a big ceremonial hall in the lodge. The huge double doors at the back of the hall are open wide, and two Yakuza bosses - KEIJI and KAZUO - process in with their entourages of goons and geishas following behind them. To either side, Hideaki's own Yakuza men sit cross-legged at long, low, floor-level dining tables.

Keiji and Kazuo look more like bland, middle-aged salarymen than gang bosses. Their lieutenants YUKIO and DEBUSEN stand beside and slightly behind each of the bosses. These lieutenants are nasty pieces of work, and we'll be seeing more of them in the future. Yukio has crazy hair and wears a leering *kabuki* mask. He carries twin pistols in under-arm holsters, and both of his trigger-fingers have been replaced with bionic prosthetics. They're itchy. Debusen is a fat, giggling buffoon with beady little bionic eyes.

KEIJI
LORD HIDEAKI. AN **HONOR** TO BE IN YOUR GRACIOUS COMPANY.

KAZUO
WE ARE **HUMBLED** BY YOUR HOSPITALITY.

3) Low angle, looking up past the two incoming bosses, who both bow politely. Before and above them is a raised dais at the end of the hall, where HIDEAKI and his entourage wait. Hideaki is a glowering tyrant, smouldering with evil, who models himself on the warlords of old Japan. He bows only very slightly, unwilling to humble himself before his "honored" guests. A huge black dragon banner hangs above the dais behind him...

HIDEAKI
LORD **KEIJI.** LORD **KAZUO.**

4) Hideaki smiles thinly, but his eyes are cold and murderous...

HIDEAKI
WELCOME TO **TOKYO.**

5) Small inset. Geishas carry trays of sushi.

6) Small inset. A tattooed, sweaty *kodo* drummer - dressed in nothing but a loincloth and headband - hammers away at a huge ceremonial drum.

PAGE 16

1) Later. Keiji and Kazuo - sit cross-legged to either side of Hideaki's seat. Their lieutenants Yukio and Debusen sit behind them. Also present are Manzo, Renjiro and Takara. Hideaki stands to address the seated crowd...

HIDEAKI
TWO CENTURIES AGO, OUR NATION LOST ITS WAY. OPENING THE DOOR TO THE WAYS OF THE WEST, THE EMPEROR THREW AWAY A THOUSAND YEARS OF HONOR AND HERITAGE.
(link)
THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR *BUSHIDO* - THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR - IN HIS BRAVE NEW WORLD. THE GLORY OF THE *SAMURAI* WAS ALL BUT EXTINGUISHED.

2) Move in close on Hideaki - an impressive character portrait of our main series villain, framed by the black dragon flag behind him.

HIDEAKI
YET AN EMBER OF THE OLD WAYS STILL BURNED.
(link)
DRIVEN UNDERGROUND, HUNTED AND OPPRESSED, SOME STILL DREAMED OF THE JAPAN THAT HAD BEEN, AND COULD BE AGAIN.
(link)
OUTLAWS AND RENEGADES, DREAMERS AND ROMANTICS, THEY RALLIED BENEATH THE BANNER OF THE **BLACK DRAGON CLAN.**

3) View from behind him, addressing the crowd.

HIDEAKI
BUT WITH THE COMING OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC **MELTDOWN,** THE BUREAUCRATS TURNED NOT TO THESE HEROES OF THE COMMON MAN, BUT TO THE **ARMY** TO SAVE THEM. AN ARMY ENSLAVED TO THE WILL OF **MACHINES.**
(link)
THEY **SEIZED** OUR NATION. PRIVATIZED ITS **INDUSTRIES.** COMMANDEERED ITS **BANKS.**
(link)
(Cont'd...)

Cont'd:

HIDEAKI (Cont'd)
THEY CALL THEMSELVES THE **SAVIOURS** OF JAPAN, BUT WE KNOW THEM BY THEIR **TRUE** NAME --

4) Extreme close on Hideaki, his face twisted with distaste, as if the word itself is bitter in his mouth --

HIDEAKI
COMMUNISTS.

5) Hideaki turns and gestures towards Keiji and Kazuo, seated behind him.

HIDEAKI
NOW, THE TIME HAS COME FOR THE THREE GREAT YAKUZA CLANS TO **FREE** OUR NATION. TO STAND TOGETHER, NOT AS **RIVALS**, BUT AS **ALLIES.**
(link)
CLAN KEIJI OF HOKKAIDO, **CLAN KAZUO** OF KYUSHU-SHIKOKU, AND **CLAN HIDEAKI** OF HONSHU - UNITED AT LAST BENEATH THE BANNER OF THE **BLACK DRAGON.**

PAGE 17

1) Manzo claps his hands - a signal for a geisha waiting to one side. She caries a tray with a sake bottle and three small white clay cups.

MANZO
BRING *SAKE!*

2) The three bosses each take a cup of sake, smiling.

HIDEAKI
THREE CUPS. THREE LORDS. THREE EQUAL SHARES.
(link)
LET THIS SYMBOLIZE OUR THREE CLANS BECOMING ONE!

KEIJI
TO HIDEAKI!

KAZUO
AND TO HIS ADVISOR, **RENJIRO**, WHO FIRST **PROPOSED** THIS HISTORIC UNION!

3) Extreme close. Hideaki smiles evilly. Murder in his eyes.

HIDEAKI
OH YES.
(link)
TO RENJIRO.

4) Hideaki, Keiji and Kazuo each swig back their sake in a single gulp --

5) TAKARA watches silently, fearful, wide-eyed, waiting to see what will happen...

6) Close on Hideaki. His expression is sly, almost mischievous, accusatory...

HIDEAKI
MORE *SAKE?*

PAGE 18

1) Hideaki's POV. Keiji frowns, uncomfortable, rubbing a sore throat. Kazuo stares at us, as if quietly surprised to see that nothing has happened to Hideaki...

KEIJI
...*UH*, THANK YOU, NO. MY THROAT IS FEELING... A LITTLE **DRY.**
(link)
YUKIO! BRING ME **WATER.** YUKIO... ?

2) Keiji's POV, low angle. Hideaki stands, looming over us, dominating. Yukio and Debusen flank him, as if they were his own bodyguards. They grin evilly...

HIDEAKI
YOUR LIEUTENANTS ANSWER TO **ME** NOW.
(link)
AS WILL YOUR **CLANS.**

YUKIO
SORRY, BOSS. WHAT CAN I TELL YA?

DEBUSEN
IT'S, *UH*... NOTHIN' **PERSONAL!**

3) Kazuo rises to his feet, enraged and alarmed. Hideaki is impassive. Keiji still sits, choking now. In the background, the audience of mobsters watch the drama unfolding with rapt attention --

KAZUO
W-WHAT IS THE **MEANING** OF THIS -- ?

HIDEAKI
YOU HAVE BUT A FEW BREATHS LEFT TO **TAKE**, KAZUO. DO NOT **TAINT** THEM WITH **LIES** AND **PROTESTATIONS.**
(link)
I **KNOW** THE TWO OF YOU PLANNED TO **MURDER** ME HERE TONIGHT. WISELY FOR THEM, YOUR LIEUTENANTS SAW THEIR FUTURE LAY INSTEAD WITH **ME.**

4) Keiji topples over, dead. Now Kazuo falls to his knees, clawing at his throat in agony, his eyes bugging horribly...

KEIJI
(ragged)
UUUHH...

Cont'd...

Cont'd:

KAZUO
AKKH --
(link)
THE P-POISON -- !

5) Wide shot. Hideaki stands, commanding the crowd below like the charismatic tyrant he is. The two rival bosses lie curled dead at his feet --

HIDEAKI
I CLAIM THEIR TERRITORIES AS MY OWN IN RECOMPENSE!
(link)
IF ANY MAN HERE BELIEVES THIS UNJUST, LET HIM SPEAK NOW!

PAGE 19

1) Yakuza guards standing against the back wall cock the bolts on their heavy-caliber assault rifles --

2) The Yakuza diners down below exchange fearful glances. Nobody dares say a word.

3) Move in closer on Hideaki, smoldering.

HIDEAKI
BUT THERE IS YET ONE FINAL WRONG TO RIGHT. A **THIRD** SERPENT IN OUR MIDST...
(link)
ONE OF OUR **OWN,** ONE WHO SMUGGLED THE POISON INTO THIS VERY HALL...
(link)
ONE CLOSE TO MY **HEART.** ONE WHOM I **TRUSTED** MORE THAN **ANY OTHER!**

4) Renjiro's POV. Takara looks over to us, terrified. Her expression silently screams, "help me!"

5) Takara's POV. Renjiro stares at us in absolute horror, frozen like a rabbit in the headlights. He thinks he can see what is about to happen, and there's nothing he can do to save her --

6) Renjiro's POV. Hideaki towers over us, suddenly pointing an accusing finger down at us, like a vengeful god --

HIDEAKI
MY MOST **TRUSTED** ADVISOR... AND MY CLOSEST **FRIEND** --
(link)
RENJIRO!

PAGE 20

1) Close on Renjiro, completely taken aback --

RENJIRO
M-MY LORD... ?

2) Takara is equally amazed, and alarmed --

TAKARA
WHAT -- ?

3) Hideaki glowers with black rage --

HIDEAKI
MANZO TRACED A COVERT **HOLO-SIGNAL** TO THE WOODS WHERE YOU PRACTICED THIS MORNING.
(link)
DO YOU **DENY** THIS CONSPIRACY?

4) Still sitting cross-legged, Renjiro lowers his head, as if crushed with shame...

RENJIRO
I-- I--
(link)
... I DENY NOTHING.
(link)
MY SHAME OVERWHELMS ME.

5) Manzo stands holding a long tray, covered with a white cloth. Hideaki takes one corner of the cloth, about to pull it off --

HIDEAKI
THEN YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO.

6) Close on the tray as the cloth is pulled aside, revealing Renjiro's swords - the long *katana* and the *wakizashi* short-sword.

1) Takara rises and tries to rush to us, but Yukio and Debusen hold her back --

TAKARA
N-NO! PLEASE, RENJIRO --
(link)
PLEASE, YOU DON'T HAVE TO **DO** THIS --
!

2) Hideaki crouches beside Renjiro, confiding, resting a consoling hand on Renjiro's shoulder. Manzo lays the tray on the floor before Renjiro.

HIDEAKI
BUT FIRST...
(link)
... JUST TELL ME **WHY.**

3) Hideaki's POV. Extreme close on Renjiro, looking up at us with infinite, hollow-hearted sadness in those dark eyes of his. He is telling the absolute truth - although perhaps not in the way Hideaki thinks he is...

RENJIRO
FOR **TAKARA.**
(link)
I COULD NOT LIVE WITHOUT HER. AND I COULD NOT LIVE WHILE SHE WAS **YOURS.**
(link)
PERHAPS... IT IS **BETTER** THIS WAY.

4) Extreme close on Takara, weeping, struggling like a wildcat in the lieutenants' arms, frantic, close to hysteria, desperately trying to reach for us --

TAKARA
NO! IT'S NOT TRUE! IT'S NOT TRUE --
!
(link)
IT WAS ME, IT WAS ***<u>MEEEEEEE</u>*** **--**

5) Renjiro kneels. He has taken the short-sword, wrapped a white napkin around the hilt, and now holds the tip of the blade to his belly. Ready to commit *seppuku*. Manzo stands over him, holding the familiar sword, ready to raise it and bring it down on Renjiro's neck for the mercy stroke --

Cont'd...

Cont'd:

MANZO
I’LL MAKE IT **QUICK**, OLD MAN.
(link)
YOU WON’T MIND IF I KEEP YOUR
SWORDS AS A **MEMENTO** OF OUR...
FRIENDSHIP.

6) Extreme close on Renjiro, his head bowed, his face almost hidden from us.

RENJIRO
(small text)
FORGIVE ME, MY LOVE.

7) Closer. Renjiro’s face cracks into a mask of agony as he drives the blade into his own guts --

RENJIRO
(ragged)
HKK--

PAGE 22

1) Manzo raises the sword, ready to cut off Renjiro's head - but Hideaki holds out his hand, halting him --

HIDEAKI
STAY YOUR HAND A MOMENT, MANZO...

2) Move in closer on Hideaki. Grim, watching his old friend's prolonged (off-panel) suffering...

HIDEAKI
I WANT TO **SAVOR** THIS.

3) Renjiro grits his teeth in agony --

4) Takara's face is a mask of horror --

5) BIG! Manzo suddenly brings the sword SLICING DOWN! Renjiro is hidden below the bottom of the panel, but we can imagine his decapitation only too clearly --

<u>PAGE 23</u>

FULL PAGE SPLASH. Pull back into a wide shot, taking in the whole scene like a frozen tableau. Manzo stands over the headless corpse, the bloody sword still in his hand. Renjiro's head lies in a pool of spreading blood. Takara curls into a tight foetal ball, her face buried in her clawed hands, crazed with grief and horror. The two Yakuza bosses lie dead. The guests watch from below like a theater audience, mesmerized. And in the midst of all this horror, Hideaki sits quite calmly and composed at the floor-table and says --

HIDEAKI
NOW.
(link)
LET'S **EAT.**

[TO BE CONTINUED]